

FINANCING OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN BELGIUM

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In the early 1990s, a scandalous story about what became known as the Belgian Billionaire Gang running one of the biggest women trafficking rings in Western Europe (De Stoop, 1992) roused the nation. The ensuing public outrage promptly gave rise to a parliamentary committee of inquiry, set with the task of scrutinising the prevalent criminal policy on trafficking in persons (BE-E2; BE-E5) (Boels & Ponsaers, 2011). The multidisciplinary policy direction that to date typifies the Belgian response to the issue of human trafficking has its origin in the work of this committee of inquiry (BE-E2). On account of this early awareness of the issue, Belgium has taken on a pioneering role in dealing with this transgression (Boels & Ponsaers, 2011).

Following the law of 13 April 1995 on trafficking in human beings (THB), the legal framework on this type of misconduct has gone through a number of developments (DSB, 2015; GRETA, 2016). Contrary to the definition introduced by the UN Palermo Protocol (Efrat, 2016), the method of operation is not part of the Belgian delineation of human trafficking. Only the act and intent of exploitation are constituent elements of the crime, whereas the means of exploitation are considered as an aggravating factor (CGKRB, 2011). Using a relatively open concept in preference to an exhaustive list of illicit behaviours, the Belgian definition of human trafficking hinges on the exploitation itself rather than on the methods of exploitation (GRETA, 2016). Another point of divergence is the demarcation of labour exploitation. Labour exploitation is defined in a much broader sense than the term "forced labour," as labour exploitation is described in terms of working below the level of human dignity (GRETA, 2016; Leman & Janssens, 2015). As a matter of course, the qualification of inhumane circumstances leaves a broad margin of interpretation (CGKRB, 2011). Consequently, the distinction between bad employment practices and labour exploitation is at times far from clear-cut (de Jager, Hassani, & Pennings, 2016). Similarly, seeing that prostitution offences are generally de facto tolerated, an ambivalent legal situation is intrinsic to the matter of sexual exploitation as well (BE-E6; BE-E13).

As mentioned before, Belgium has broken ground in terms of implementing a multidisciplinary approach towards trafficking in persons (BE-E2; BE-E5) (OSCE, 2013). As a general rule, sexual exploitation is handled by the public prosecutor and the police forces. Conversely, the social inspection services and the labour prosecutor, a specialised branch of the public prosecution office, cover labour exploitation cases (BE-E2; BE-E3; BE-E11; BE-E13). As follows, social and labour inspectorates play an important role in tackling the issue of human trafficking, notably because they carry far-reaching investigative powers and significant expertise and experience

in this matter (de Jager et al., 2016; Leman & Janssens, 2015). The substantial involvement of these actors is indicative of Belgium's distinct focus on labour exploitation (BE-E2; BE-E5). Going beyond pure law enforcement, a noteworthy materialisation of Belgium's multidisciplinary approach is the Interdepartmental Coordination Cell embracing all actors involved in the fight against trafficking in persons, which is entrusted with the coordination of the policy on human trafficking (DSB, 2015).

Belgium is primarily known as a destination country and, to a lesser extent, as a transit country for human trafficking operations (Akee et al., 2014). As a source country, Belgium plays a minimal part (Shelley, 2010), but on the whole is widely regarded as one of the most targeted countries by human traffickers (Balarezo, 2013; Europol, 2016). Conversely, Belgium also stands among the countries taking most action against human trafficking (Walk Free Foundation, 2016).

Trafficking in persons is an issue that has been brought into focus over twenty years ago, yet our understanding of the subject is far from complete. One facet that has been largely neglected is the financial dimension of human trafficking operations. In response to this knowledge gap, the present research report explores the financial management of trafficking in human beings in Belgium on the basis of a literature review, a document analysis of the human trafficking cases described by the Federal Migration Centre, which functions as the National Reporter on trafficking in human beings for Belgium, and face-to-face interviews with both professionals who are well-informed on the subject of trafficking in persons and perpetrators convicted of trafficking offences.¹ As regards the latter method, respondents were selected with a view to reflecting the diversity of the frontline practitioners, who are confronted with human trafficking cases on a day-to-day basis. The interviews were conducted by aid of a standardized interview protocol and subsequently analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

1. MARKET OVERVIEW

Like most forms of organised crime, trafficking in human beings crops up against a backdrop of envisioned profitability (Petrunov, 2011; Wheaton et al., 2010). To illustrate this point, the federal judicial police has estimated that the proceeds of human trafficking in Belgium writ large amount to nearly a billion euros per year (Delepière et al., 2013). In a related manner, sexual exploitation is deeply rooted in the sex industry, which has an estimated overall value of between €617 and €688 million (Adriaenssens et al., 2015). Labour exploitation, on the other hand, is intrinsic to a wide variety of economic sectors. Table 1

¹ The sources have been coded in order to preserve their anonymity. The first two letters of the code indicate the country, "E" indicates an expert, while "C" means criminal entrepreneur. The description of the background of the individual sources referenced can be found in the list of interviewees in the references section.

indicates the most prominent sectors uncovered by the social inspection services in Belgium. Generally, industries that are on the nether side of the so called “three Ds” touchstone, meaning they involve work that is dirty, difficult, or dangerous, and industries that are less regulated are more exposed to labour exploitation (Davies, 2017; Europol, 2017). The sectors most serviceable for the purpose of exploitation are the logistics business (e.g. transportation), labour intensive businesses (e.g. agriculture), and the hospitality, entertainment, services, and retail sector (e.g. menial work) (Finance Against Trafficking, 2014). Having said that, labour exploitation is virtually ubiquitous in the licit economy (ILO, 2014; Kara, 2011). Consequently, labour trafficking manifests itself in many different ways (Efrat, 2016).

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF INITIAL RECORDED REPORTS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN BELGIUM IN 2016 BY ECONOMIC SECTOR

Sector	Number of reports
Hospitality/Horeca	9
Construction	5
Service stations	5
Retail	5
Domestic help	2
Cleaning services	1
Wholesale	1
Other	4
Total	32

Source: Myria (2017).

By the same token, a number of business sectors are highly functional for the commission of human trafficking offences. Generally speaking, the ties between the human trafficking business and the legitimate market are wide-ranging (Bravo, 2008; Parmentier, 2010). This nexus between the shadow and legitimate economy reflects a general trend of increasing proximity between organised crime operations and legal business structures (Savona & Riccardi, 2015; Van Duyn, 1993, 1993b). As for the purpose of this proximity, legitimate ventures provide the means for the fabrication of a legal façade (Aronowitz et al., 2010). By definition, corporate

structures are utilized more in labour trafficking than in sex trafficking operations² (BE-E1). Tucking away criminal activities within a legal business scheme by dint of opaque, non-transparent corporate structures and empty shell or fictitious companies is a common practice in the human trafficking industry (BE-E2; BE-E5; BE-E7; BE-E9; BE-E10). As a consequence, human trafficking operations routinely cut across the divide between upper world and underground economy, blending the boundary between legal and illegal ventures (Europol, 2015). As such, a strict distinction between *mala fide* and *bona fide* entrepreneurship is at variance with the brass tacks of the trafficking business (BE-E5). In addition to harbouring human trafficking activities, legal business structures facilitate various aspects of the criminal process, such as transportation and money laundering (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Finance Against Trafficking, 2014; Leman & Janssens, 2015).

² Although there are legal establishments in which sexual and labour exploitation of women takes place simultaneously.

As follows, human trafficking operations mostly hide in plain sight or, in rare instances such as household service, are fully sequestered (Bravo, 2008). The masking of exploitative practices, among other things, renders detecting and identifying human trafficking cases notoriously difficult (DSB, 2015; Kleemans & Smit, 2014). Seeing that human trafficking is a gravely underreported phenomenon (Goodey, 2008; Guia, 2015), any claims regarding the incidence of trafficking in human beings cannot be substantiated (Kopp, 2012; Parmentier, 2010; Weitzer, 2014a). Consequently, the figures presented hereafter are more suggestive of law enforcement activity than they reflect criminal activity (Kleemans & Smit, 2014; Levi et al., 2013). As Table 2 reveals, the number of human trafficking offences identified by Belgian police forces has steadily decreased over the last few years. About two thirds of these registered infractions relate to sexual exploitation, whereas labour exploitation makes up roughly one third of all recorded infringements. The UNODC (2016) has reported similar findings among registered victims. This is in stark contrast to the assertion made by Europol (2016) that a striking 90% of organised crime networks associated with human trafficking activities are involved in sexual exploitation. Accordingly, estimates regarding the type of human trafficking that is most prevalent are manifestly conflicting (Weitzer, 2014a). As territory is of very little concern in the human trafficking business (BE-E4) (Kopp, 2012), the reports on human trafficking cases do not point to the presence of hotspots, with the exception of certain forms of prostitution (Levitt & Venkatesh, 2007; Mancuso, 2014). For instance, window prostitution is limited to certain areas (Adriaenssens et al., 2015), which can spark a power struggle between competing crime groups over those vice districts (BE-E11).

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS INFRACTIONS, ORGANIZED BY TYPE OF EXPLOITATION IN BELGIUM, 2012 – 2016

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Sexual exploitation	466	586	460	467	396
Economic exploitation	321	273	166	160	168
Forced begging	44	33	38	33	13
Forced criminality	13	14	15	9	11
Organ harvesting	1	1	1	0	1
Total	845	907	680	669	589

Source: Myria (2017).

Whereas the number of reported infractions has dwindled, Table 3 shows that the number of convictions is clearly on the rise. In fact, Belgium has a relatively high number of convictions in comparison to other countries (DSB, 2015). Consistent with international findings (Eurostat, 2015; UNODC, 2016), one in five persons convicted of human trafficking offences in Belgium is a woman. The involvement of women

in the human trafficking trade is thus comparatively large (Kleemans & Smit, 2014). The gendered dimension of trafficking in human beings is particularly pervasive with respect to the victims of exploitation (Guia, 2015; Hughes, 2014; Shelley, 2010), as illustrated by Table 4. In essence, the greater part of victims of sexual exploitation are female, whereas victims of labour exploitation are predominantly male (Eurostat, 2015). As regards sexual exploitation, the registered victims are scattered across different age categories. Labour exploitation, on the other hand, seems to affect an older target group. On the whole, minors appear to be an exception among registered victims (Eurostat, 2015).

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING OFFENCES IN BELGIUM, ORGANIZED BY GENDER, 2009 – 2016

Gender	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Unknown	2	5	5	6	7	2	2	0
Male	111	75	76	71	59	59	63	37
Female	28	20	21	14	17	23	19	10
Total	141	100	102	91	83	84	84	47

Source: DSB (2017).

TABLE 4. NUMBER OF REGISTERED VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN BELGIUM, ORGANIZED BY GENDER, AGE AND TYPE OF EXPLOITATION, 2013 – 2016

Total	Sexual exploitation				Labour exploitation				Other exploitation				Total			
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016
<18	4	1	5	4	0	1	3	2	0	3	6	0	4	5	14	6
18-25	15	19	22	23	19	18	9	9	0	1	1	2	34	38	32	34
26-30	8	12	7	7	13	26	6	13	0	0	0	3	21	38	13	23
>30	10	11	10	14	47	41	43	38	0	5	5	4	57	57	58	56
Total	37	43	44	48	79	86	61	62	0	9	12	9	116	138	117	119
Male	1	5	2	0	67	74	52	51	0	5	9	8	68	84	63	59
Female	36	38	42	48	12	12	9	11	0	4	3	1	48	54	54	60

Source: Myria (2017).

Aside from a distinctive gender profile, human traffickers make for a diversified group in many other respects (Viukho, 2017). Perpetrators of human trafficking offences range from the very rich (BE-E2; BE-E8; BE-E10) down to the very poor (BE-E2; BE-E4; BE-E8). Strictly speaking, those who know their way around the sex trade (BE-E6) or any other implicated sector are in the capacity to take advantage of their pre-existing knowledge,

TABLE 5. TOP 10 OF THE MOST IMPORTANT NATIONALITIES OF PERSONS CONVICTED FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING OFFENCES IN BELGIUM IN 2016

Nationality	Number of convicted persons
Belgium	37
Romania	11
Unknown/unregistered	8
Albania	8
Bulgaria	8
France	6
The Netherlands	6
China	5
Portugal	4
United Kingdom	3
Other	29
Total	125

Source: Myria (2017).

contacts, or even resources. A case in point is the involvement of business operators with a military, state security, or law enforcement background in human trafficking operations (BE-E13) (Leman & Janssens, 2015; Shelley, 2010). Moving individuals from point A to point B in order to exploit them at their journey's end is the sum and substance of any human trafficking operation (Efrat, 2016; Kleemans & Smit, 2014). As a result, the human trafficking business relies on people who are capable of bridging the gap between a certain country of origin and the country of destination (BE-E13) (Kleemans, 2012). In essence, members of certain diaspora communities are in a position to capitalize on their transnational connections by means of human trafficking schemes (Arhin, 2016; Shelley,

2010). Nationality is thus an important connecting thread in the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings. In this respect, Table 5 reveals a variegated picture of perpetrators of human trafficking. EU-nationals, by and large, make up the greater part of human trafficking offenders (Europol, 2016; Eurostat, 2015; Savona & Riccardi, 2015; UNODC, 2016; Walk Free Foundation, 2016). In addition, the main organised crime groups implicated in human trafficking activities are east European, Nigerian and Chinese networks (Europol, 2016; OSCE, 2013; Savona & Riccardi, 2015). In sum, human traffickers are part of a remarkably heterogeneous whole (Aronowitz, 2009; Feingold, 2005). Attempting to delineate a profile would therefore negate the vast diversity of human trafficking operations (Weitzer, 2014a).

2. MARKET STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF TRAFFICKING NETWORKS

Much like the profile of human traffickers, the level of organisation in human trafficking operations varies widely (Aronowitz, 2001). Human trafficking rings are largely part of a continuum ranging from single perpetrators over loose, self-supporting networks to complex, multinational conglomerates (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Campana, 2015; Kleemans & Smit, 2014). As the logistics for trafficking in persons are fairly straightforward, there is no need for the instalment of a

colossal organised crime syndicate (BE-E15) (Bruinsma & Bernasco, 2004; Tripp & McMahon-Howard, 2016). Alternatively, groups formed on an ad hoc basis (BE-E4) (Kopp, 2012), networks built on familial or clan ties (Europol, 2015; OSCE, 2013) (BE-C2; BE-C3) or even one-man operations (BE-C1) seem to get the job done without the encumbrance of a monolithic corporate structure. In essence, human trafficking operations are generally more organised in terms of their activities than they are organised in terms of structure (Leman & Janssens, 2008; Tripp & McMahon-Howard, 2016). Human trafficking operations can thus be surprisingly disorganised (Feingold, 2005). At any rate, less organised does not necessarily mean less serious (BE-E2; BE-E9; BE-E10). On the whole, human trafficking operations tend to be rather small scale. That is, exponentially increasing the volume of trafficked persons poses the network for the organisational challenge of effectively monitoring this mass of people. Consequently, economies of scale are practically non-existent in the human trafficking business (Campana, 2015). Moreover, it is in the interest of criminal entrepreneurs to curb the number of associates who have compromising knowledge of the criminal undertaking as to keep the lid on the whole trafficking operation (Schloenhardt, 1999; Van Duyne et al., 2007). Not only are trafficking networks typically limited in size (Bruinsma & Bernasco, 2004; Kopp, 2012), these organisations are further marked by their flexible structure (Aronowitz, 2001; Europol, 2016). The decentralized business structure of human trafficking groups reminds one, perhaps unsurprisingly, of the loosely tied business structure of human smuggling rings (BE-E5) (Europol, 2016). This high degree of decentralization and flexibility allows for the continuous optimisation of their business model (BE-E13). By their very nature, human trafficking networks are learning organisations, able and willing to adapt their business to ever-changing circumstances (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Leman & Janssens, 2008). Those who fail to do so are inevitably headed for failure.

As mentioned before, the arrangement of relations between the different nodes of a human trafficking operation favours functionality over unduly complicated forms of organisation. Depending on the nationality and size of the group, some networks bear great resemblance to a pyramidal organisation structure (BE-E4; BE-E5). Human trafficking operations often incorporate a rudimentary form of hierarchy, which is essentially a crystallization of any present division of roles (Aronowitz, 2001). Central to the human trafficking business structure is the creation of an intermediate level between the organizers and the victims of exploitation (BE-E10) (Leman & Janssens, 2015). In larger, multinational organisations, this principle takes the form of a management unit and smaller, specialised subunits (Aronowitz et al., 2010). Notwithstanding the wide variety of human trafficking operations and the wide variety of actors involved (Vermeulen et al., 2010), a number of roles seem to be inherent to the trafficking trade. At the top are the organisers or coordinators, who function as the brain of the human trafficking operation (BE-E4; BE-E5; BE-E10; BE-E12). Organizers are assisted by their right-hand men, also known as lieutenants (BE-E4) (Leman & Janssens, 2015). Business operators (Wheaton et al., 2010) tasked with the day-to-day management of human trafficking activities can fulfil a variety of functions, including the roles of

recruiter (BE-E7; BE-E10; BE-E11), transporter (BE-E6; BE-E7), and enforcer or supervisor (BE-E12; BE-E13). Women often play a special part in human trafficking schemes. One notable example is the role of *dame de compagnie* or big sister companion (BE-E1; BE-E5; BE-E7), who serves as an intermediary between the victim and the exploiter (Leman & Janssens, 2015). Supplementary to the roles fulfilled by the core group, certain tasks that require specific knowledge or skills can be outsourced to service providers or facilitators (Leman & Janssens, 2008; Soudijn, 2014; Tijhuis, 2006). Notable examples are accountants (BE-E1; BE-E3; BE-E5; BE-E11), employment agencies (BE-E1; BE-E13) (BE-C2), and professional money launderers (BE-E3; BE-E5).

As regards the workings of human trafficking operations, trafficking in persons unfolds itself as a cycle of actions rather than a single offence (Guia, 2015). The process of human trafficking spans the consecutive phases of recruitment, transportation, and exploitation (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Salt & Stein, 1997). Before anything else, one needs to find people that are going to fuel the trafficking business (BE-E10; BE-10). To this end, a prospective workforce is round up, in most cases through traditional forms of recruitment (BE-E10) such as classified ads or word-of-mouth marketing (BE-E4; BE-E11; BE-E13). Recruitment almost always involves a certain level of deceit (Shelley, 2010). Most are recruited under false pretences (BE-E6; BE-E9; BE-E11), but in exceptional cases the victims are forced from the very beginning to go to Western Europe (BE-E6). For the recruitment to succeed, the recruiter should be someone who seems to inspire trust, possibly an acquaintance of the victim (Korsell et al., 2011; Shelley, 2010). Occasionally, the recruitment process can run in two directions, seeing that individuals who “view (...) prostitution as a logical option compared to other work alternatives” (García, 2016, p. 149) at times deliberately look for intermediaries or *souteneurs* in the interest of easing their debut into the sex trade (BE-C1). Once a person is won over by hook or by crook, the victim is transferred to the country of destination by any means conceivable (Shelley, 2010). Planes, trains, buses and cars are all recurrent forms of transportation (BE-E1; BE-E9; BE-E11). If possible, legal documents are used as not to arouse suspicion (BE-E1) (Kleemans & Smit, 2014). Intercontinental trafficking, on the contrary, often calls for smuggling practices (BE-E7; BE-E9). After arrival, the actual exploitation can take place. Victims are usually accommodated in small houses or flats (BE-E11), more often than not in substandard living conditions (BE-E1; BE-E9; BE-E10; BE-E13). Imposing some form of control and forcing victims into a position of utter dependency is central to the practice of exploitation (BE-E2; BE-E11; BE-E13). To this end, human traffickers frequently make use of the system of debt bondage. In essence, victims are coerced to repay large sums of money for their transportation, accommodation, and so on (BE-E5; BE-E7; BE-E9; BE-E11). After a while, the cycle repeats itself with new victims (BE-E1; BE-E11). Previous victims either get out, move up the criminal ladder or become an object of barter between the initial group and other trafficking networks (BE-E1; BE-E6). Human trafficking operations are principally characterised by rotation, dislocation, and a high rate of victim replacement (Europol, 2016; Kleemans & Smit, 2014). More sophisticated, transnational organisations are able to set up carousel

structures, which allow them to transfer victims from country to country (BE-E5; BE-E6; BE-E7).

For the most part, the archetypal equation of human trafficking with coerced prostitution or forced labour is somewhat misguided. At present, downright coercion seems to be the exception rather than the rule in trafficking operations (Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014; García, 2016; Guia, 2015). As it happens, keeping a crowd of resentful victims under one's thumb is nothing short of a logistical nightmare (Zhang, 2011). Conversely, by offering victims a win-win situation in the spirit of professionalisation (BE-E3; BE-E5; BE-E6) (Leman & Janssens, 2015), perpetrators avoid the major level of commitment intrinsic to extracting forced services. Lastly, the abuse of traditional cultural practices at one's discretion is central to many international trafficking rings, notably in Albanian, Romanian, Nigerian, Chinese or even Indian circles (BE-E5; BE-E12) (Leman & Janssens, 2015).

Over and above this general method of operating, there are countless ways of carrying out human trafficking activities (OSCE, 2013). In the matter of sexual exploitation, two specific *modi operandi* are highlighted. First off, Nigerian networks are specialised in criminal exchange programmes or carousel setups (BE-E5) (Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014). Nigerian human trafficking operations are by definition intercontinental. Victims are smuggled via the Libya route to Italy, where they are picked up and brought to Western Europe (BE-E5; BE-E6; BE-E7). The debt incurred by this journey can be as much as €60,000 per trafficked victim (BE-E5). In conjunction with debt bondage, victims are controlled through voodoo rituals and violence (BE-E5; BE-E7; BE-E12). Some victims manage to move up the ranks and assume the position of "madam" (BE-E5; BE-E7) (Europol, 2016). In this way, the system of exploitation preserves itself (BE-E7) (Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014). The lover-boy method, on the other hand, revolves around emotional manipulation and the perversion of social relationships (Kleemans, 2012; OSCE, 2013). Lover-boys prey on vulnerable girls or women (BE-E5; BE-E12). In the case of respondent BE-C3, for example, teenage runaways from juvenile institutions were deliberately targeted (Myria, 2016). By means of an intense grooming process, the perpetrators isolate their victims, bind them to themselves and subsequently pressure them into doing sex work (BE-E12) (Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014; OSCE, 2013). As regards labour trafficking, the workings of economic exploitation are quite diverse. The whole idea of labour trafficking is to keep labour costs at a minimum with a view to maximising profits (Kara, 2011; Wheaton et al., 2010). The posting of workers from low-wage in high-wage countries lends itself well to that purpose (Delepière et al., 2013), as it enables the entrepreneur to employ workers in the country of destination under the conditions of the country of origin (BE-E1; BE-E9). These types of secondment schemes or social dumping practices (BE-E9; BE-E10) are frequently accompanied by bogus self-employment ploys (BE-E2; BE-E5; BE-E7; BE-E9; BE-E13). By falsely declaring workers as self-employed, the enterprise is no longer bound by regular terms of employment (CGKRB, 2011) and, in turn, manages to evade certain social security contributions (BE-E2). Additionally, subcontracting arrangements, sometimes in the form of elaborate subcontracting cascades,

can be put into place as a way to distance the organiser from the actual exploitation (Delepière et al., 2013). Moreover, operating from within the framework of a legitimate corporate structure provides opportunities for coating exploitative practices with a veneer of legality (Leman & Janssens, 2015). In order to sustain this pretence of legitimacy, entrepreneurs can for instance declare a minimal amount of work hours (BE-E4). In the same vein, victims of sexual exploitation working in bars or windows are sometimes registered under horeca contracts for tax purposes, yet worked hours and earnings are routinely under-declared (Boels, 2015; Weitzer, 2014b; Weitzer & Boels, 2015). Another avenue is to simply take advantage of legislative loopholes (BE-E5). On this point, perpetrators use the ambiguity of the legal framework on human trafficking for their own ends by deliberately framing the work of their victims in such a way that is possible to denounce the charge of human trafficking (Europol, 2017; Leman & Janssens, 2015). In this context, human trafficking for labour exploitation has more to do with structural labour market vulnerabilities than it bears upon the “aberrant criminal actions of deviant traffickers” (Davies, 2017; Shamir, 2012, p. 112).

That being said, trafficking in human beings often coincides with plenty of other transgressions. Depending on the *modus operandi* concerned, human trafficking operations regularly draw on a string of ancillary or instrumental offences (Vermeulen et al., 2010). Evidently, human trafficking and human smuggling activities can be very much interconnected (Kleemans & Smit, 2014). In order to move victims to where they are needed, some networks resort to the ticket of document forgery (Europol, 2017) or corruption (BE-E5). One illustrative example is an elaborate human trafficking case involving Thai massage parlours. With the help of an employee of the Thai embassy in Brussels, the criminal organisation managed to obtain residence permits for all the girls. The staff member concerned charged no less than €6,000 per person for her services. As for the transportation of Thai girls, airport staff was bribed into turning a blind eye to their false documents (CGKRB, 2012). Parallel to transferring victims, the accommodation of victims quite often backslides to rack-renting practices (BE-E4; BE-E8; BE-E9; BE-E10). The extent to which organisations engage in criminal activities that do not add to the commission of the human trafficking offence, on the other hand, widely differs from profile to profile (BE-E5). In respect to other organised criminal activities, trafficking in human beings is often associated with drug trafficking (Dank et al., 2014). However, a connection to the drug trade can also be contributory to the commission of human trafficking, as drugging victims of sexual exploitation is a tried and tested method of inducing compliance (BE-E7; BE-E11) (Boels, 2015; Leman & Janssens, 2015). In other instances, human trafficking is linked to other criminal activities by the use of victims in other criminal activities (Europol, 2015), such as the case of Vietnamese labourers working on cannabis plantations (BE-E11). To all appearances, human trafficking operations verge on specialisation, as the perpetrators generally do not expand their criminal portfolio beyond their core business (BE-E1; BE-E10; BE-E13). Holding the reins over a human trafficking business is a time-consuming engagement that leaves little room for diversion. Moreover, having the means and opportunities to set up a human trafficking ring does not

necessarily mean that one also has access to alternative illicit trades (Kleemans, 2012).

It follows that interfaces between trafficking in human beings and other empirical manifestations of organised crime are far from systematic (BE-E1; BE-E12). To be accurate, some interconnections have in fact been uncovered, as in mutual connections between organised human trafficking rings (BE-E1; BE-E7; BE-E11), links with human smuggling rings (BE-E4) or links with the Chinese Triads (BE-E3) (Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014) and motorcycle gangs (BE-E11) (Myria, 2017). Most of these relationships are based on either kinship and friendship (BE-E1) or on the principle of reciprocity (Tijhuis, 2006). The system of compensation between drug trafficking and human trafficking networks to launder money is a remarkable example of this type of symbiotic collusion (see section 3.4).

3. FINANCING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

3.1. Source of capital for initiating/sustaining criminal operations

Much like the aforementioned cross-criminal collaborations, trafficking in human beings is firmly rooted in blatant opportunism. On the whole, the initial investments put into setting up human trafficking activities are minimal. As a matter of fact, criminal entrepreneurs deliberately search for ways to start up their business with as little capital as possible (BE-E3). In actuality, very little is needed to set up a human trafficking business, though this can depend on the particular method of operation. Concerning the business model of lover-boys, no launch capital whatsoever is needed (BE-E5). In entering the human trafficking business, having the necessary knowledge and the right connections takes precedence over sitting on a sizable reserve of money (BE-E4; BE-E6; BE-C3).

As law enforcement agencies rarely trouble themselves over the question of start-up capital (BE-E5; BE-E7; BE-E13), not much is known about the source of financing. In view of the fact that one can get a human trafficking operation off the ground with limited funds, own resources are a major source of financing (BE-E10). A case in point are former victims, who use the little money they have earned to set up their own business (BE-E4). Additionally, human trafficking operations can be funded by pooling resources together (BE-E3; BE-E4) or by turning to relatives (BE-E3). To illustrate, respondent BE-C2 claimed that €5,000 was all it took to establish his car wash venture, a sum which he easily secured by taking out a business loan.

By the same token, keeping a human trafficking business up and running in the face of critical moments is more of a challenge than launching said operation. Pivotal moments, such as apprehension by law enforcement authorities, put the offenders in what is essentially

a sink-or-swim situation. One way of dealing with this adversity is by maintaining control over victims in one way or another, even from behind bars (BE-E6; BE-E12). Victims who willingly bear the litigation expenses of their alleged exploiters are a grim example of this type of boundless manipulation (BE-E12). Related to this survival strategy, respondent BE-C2's family members willingly stepped in to take care of business while he served his prison sentence, thus ensuring the continuity of his undertaking. Yet, in preference to responding to crises, criminal entrepreneurs principally act in advance of law enforcement interventions. To this end, human traffickers have a whole range of counterstrategies at their disposal. If push comes to shove, human trafficking operations are quite easily uprooted and relocated elsewhere (BE-E1; BE-E5; BE-E6; BE-E7). In lieu of dislodging their entire operation, human trafficking organisations usually opt for moving their criminal assets as far as possible from the spot where the exploitation takes place (FATF & MENAFATF, 2015; Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014; Kopp, 2012). In order to mitigate the risk of losing everything, criminal proceeds should be translocated as soon as possible (BE-E4; BE-E5). Considering the deep-seated familial and international dimension of human trafficking, it is not uncommon to hide one's revenues with relatives (BE-E1; Dank et al., 2014), both in the country of origin and in third countries (BE-E5). Spreading the risk of confiscation (Aronowitz et al., 2010), for instance through various investments abroad (BE-E10), also occurs. In addition to hauling the proceeds a long way from their illicit origins, corporate structures embroiled in human trafficking activities have recourse to bankruptcy abuse and fraud (BE-E10) (Leman & Janssens, 2015). In this sense, implicated companies are suddenly insolvent on the occasion of a conviction (BE-E5; BE-E7). Furthermore, criminal entrepreneurs often go to great lengths to avoid leaving incriminating trails (BE-E5; BE-E13; Aronowitz et al., 2010), to which end various strategies are suitable. Straw men schemes (BE-E5), using the internet to sidestep wiretapping or even adopting nicknames (BE-E9) all answer this purpose.

On account of the fact that hardly any start-up capital is needed, it follows that human trafficking operations do rebound after critical episodes (BE-E4; BE-E12). However, this low market entry threshold also means that competitors eager to fill the market void are abundant (BE-E1; Leman & Janssens, 2015). In case of such a criminal *coup d'état*, the complete lack of territoriality in the human trafficking business means that the opportunities to reinstate one's business elsewhere are abundant (BE-E4). Whereas some organisations inevitably crumble, others manage to pull through. Consequently, the latter category is in a position to learn from its mistakes and adapt accordingly (BE-E5). Moreover, because of the rather modest initial investment, stripping a human trafficking networks of its assets is not enough to permanently incapacitate the operation (BE-E4). On the contrary, a convicted human trafficker is still endowed with relevant experience and the right connections. A loss of reserves or revenue might not leave one much choice but to simply take up where one previously left off (Naylor, 1999).

3.2. Settlement of payments

Aside from the occasional moment of crisis, human trafficking organisations have to deal with the everyday issue of working out a payment system. As concerns sexual exploitation, the sex trade is conventionally a cash-up-front business (BE-E1; Europol Financial Intelligence Group, 2015; Finance Against Trafficking, 2014; Korsell et al., 2011). Besides cash transactions, only a few venues accept credit card payments (BE-E1; BE-E13). Most often, the client pays to an intermediary who is present at the spot (Petrunov, 2011), such as a “big sister” companion (BE-E5; Leman & Janssens, 2015) or the local manager of the venue. Alternatively, the customer pays directly to the victim (BE-E1; BE-E7), who either immediately hands over the payment to the intermediary (BE-E11) or, more infrequently, compliantly brings the earnings to the exploiters (BE-E1; BE-E6; BE-E12; BE-E13). These types of settlements permit the criminal organisation to sever the cash flow from their commodity, in this case trafficked human beings (Kopp, 2012). As a matter of course, the organiser of the human trafficking operation sees to the redistribution of the takings among the different ranks of the organisation (BE-E11). Ordinarily, this allotment involves a fifty-fifty arrangement between the victim and the exploiter. However, one should bear in mind that all expenses are subtracted from the victim’s share (BE-E1; BE-E11; Leman & Janssens, 2015).

As for labour exploitation, a different pattern emerges. As a rule, the customer pays the employer for the work that has been done. The method of payment is largely subject to the sector of operation (BE-E1; BE-E4; BE-E11). Bank transfers are a common payment system in a number of businesses, whereas other undertakings such as carwashes are primarily cash-based. Wire transfers are usually quickly followed by a withdrawal in cash (BE-E4; Delepière et al., 2013). The employer gives money to the intermediary, who in turn pays the workers (BE-E1). For the most part, workers are paid in cash (BE-E3; BE-E4; BE-E12; Delepière et al., 2013). Again, all incurred expenses are deducted from the victims’ wages (BE-E11). In essence, the exploiter receives the payments and subsequently handles the apportionment of the organisation’s revenues (BE-E11).

Incidentally, control is of critical importance in ensuring payments from victims (BE-E5; BE-E13; Campana, 2015). Moreover, it is in the interest of the exploiter to have a clear picture of the earnings of his or her victims (BE-E13). To that end, the ways and means to keep a tight rein on trafficked victims are virtually limitless. As a matter of usual practice, victims are forced into a position of financial dependence (BE-E11). The system of debt bondage, as pointed out before, compels people to work off their debt burden (BE-E1; BE-E5; BE-E12). Accumulating wage arrears or withholding money further (BE-E2) binds the victim to the trafficking network, for fear of suffering the loss of these due payments. Likewise, exploiters sometimes hold on to the victims’ first earnings as a sort of security deposit (BE-E11). In distinction to keeping back victims’ payments, some human trafficking operations implement a crude penalty system, basically imposing a fine on all types of minor transgressions (BE-E1; BE-E10). Another aspect of control is restricting

and supervising every movement of trafficking victims. Isolating or even sequestering workers principally corresponds to this need (BE-E1; BE-E7; BE-E9; BE-E11). Under other conditions, human trafficking networks make use of technological developments such as cameras (BE-E1; BE-E13), mobile phones (BE-E5; BE-E6; BE-E7) or tachographs in lorries (BE-E10) in conjunction with "low-tech" surveillance in the form of on-the-spot supervisors (BE-E13). By taking away identity papers (BE-E6; BE-E11) or abusing the person's illegal status (BE-E4; BE-E10; BE-E12) exploiters effectively limit their victim's freedom of movement to the confines of the human trafficking operation.

In the case of a sham marriage (BE-E1) or domestic servitude, one's mobility rarely extends beyond the front door. Alongside physical restraints, psychological terror is a favoured method of control. In this respect, branding victims by means of tattoos (BE-E1; BE-E6) or outright mutilation (BE-E9) conveys an unequivocal message. On the subject of instilling fear, violence or threats thereof towards both the victim and his or her relatives are ever-present (BE-E1; BE-E7; BE-E9). Or rather, violence is not as common as more subtle means of control such as extortion, as the use of violence implies less profit and harsher punishment (Englund et al., 2008; Leman & Janssens, 2008; Vermeulen et al., 2007).

3.3. Costs of doing business

By its very nature, trafficking in human beings is a cost-saving exercise (BE-E3; BE-E4; BE-E5). From a business point of view, human trafficking makes for a relatively inexpensive undertaking considering that a trafficked individual is a remarkably low-cost "commodity" (Europol, 2015; Wheaton et al., 2010). As one would expect, the operating costs of a human trafficking organisation vary widely according to the network's method of operation (BE-E5). Ultimately, exploiters recoup any costs or expenses incurred during the operation directly from their victims (BE-E4; BE-E9; BE-E10; BE-E11).

Each stage in the process of human trafficking entails different costs. Before anything else, exploitation requires people. Getting a hold of those people mainly involves advertisement costs (BE-E1; Portnoff et al., 2017). Accordingly, the costs of recruitment are in effect next to nothing (Leman & Janssens, 2008). After ensnaring one or several victims, the prospective labour force needs to be transferred to their country of destination. Evidently, the cost of transportation is commensurate with the distance that is covered by the operation. As far as trafficking within Europe is concerned, transportation costs generally consist of plane, train, or bus fees (BE-E1; BE-E11) or, as an alternative, the price of a second-hand car or mini-van and fuel (BE-E1), as well as obtaining travel documents, whether counterfeit or not (BE-E3; BE-E13). So, in spite of appearance, transporting victims is generally a minimal cost of doing business (Kara, 2011). On the contrary, the expenditure item of transportation is conveniently turned into a source of profit. By way of illustration, a trip from Eastern Europe usually costs about €40 or roughly the price of low-budget flight (BE-E1; BE-E11). Victims, on the other

hand, are ordered to repay the traffickers upwards of €800 for their travel expenses (BE-E11). The same goes for human trafficking operations involving long-distance smuggling. Trafficked individuals incur a debt of €15,000, €30,000, or even €60,000 (Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014), a sum that is eagerly inflated in light of perceived risks of traversing borders but is in no way proportional to the real costs of transportation (BE-E5; BE-E9; BE-E11). Hence, the system of debt bondage or coerced indebtedness is a patently overblown contract (Kara, 2011).

Next, as concerns the accommodation of victims, networks frequently pay around €800 in monthly rent for a small house or apartment (BE-E1; BE-E11). In order to secure a lease agreement, human traffickers often turn to their web of contacts (Korsell et al., 2011). In preference to paying rent, in exceptional cases the cost of accommodation is avoided altogether by housing labourers in their respective workplace (BE-E10; BE-E16). Contrarily, accommodation is a cost item that is increasingly remodelled into a money-spinning scheme through the practice of rack-renting (BE-E10). If the monthly rent is €800, the exploiter simply harbours five to ten victims in the same place and charges each of them a fee of roughly €250 (BE-E11).

Furthermore, exploitation necessitates a certain infrastructure, such as a workplace, working clothes and all kinds of implements (BE-C2; BE-E1; BE-E13; Adriaenssens et al., 2015). Setting up basic organisational structures can be a substantial investment. It would, therefore, be worthwhile to look into such cases from a money laundering angle. On the other hand, if the infrastructure is pre-existent to the human trafficking activities, as is often the case with labour exploitation (BE-E4), then no investment whatsoever is required. In addition to the infrastructure of trafficking in human beings, criminal organisations are confronted with a number of operating expenses. These costs are primarily connected to the everyday management of a trafficking venture. Mobile communication and internet access are, of course, rather unexceptional business expenses (BE-E1; BE-E7). A more atypical cost item is the repatriation of criminal assets (Soudijn & Reuter, 2016), as for instance money transfer services charge a ten percent commission on transactions (BE-E13) (Brenig et al., 2015).

Other costs related to exploitation include the rent for windows, which is specific to red light districts³ (BE-E1; BE-E5) (Adriaenssens et al., 2015). Window fees normally fluctuate between €100 and €200 per shift (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Boels, 2016), though there are large regional differences (BE-E6; BE-E12; BE-E13). Advertising sexual services on-line is typically free of charge. Bumping these ads in order to draw in more customers, on the other hand, requires payment, for instance via text message (BE-E6) (Portnoff et al., 2017). As for wage costs, since

³ While on the subject of renting windows for sex work, the means of gaining access to these venues, incidental to the involvement of third parties in window prostitution, vary from place to place. As Weitzer and Boels (2015, p. 252) note: "In Antwerp, the sex workers rent window space directly from a building owner. In Brussels, madams rent a window unit from the building owner and supervise the prostitutes who work for them. In Ghent, prostitution café managers/barkeepers rent space from the building owner, and sex workers typically enter into written contracts with managers in order to occupy the space for a specific period of time."

trafficked workers are axiomatically paid well below the legal minima, labour exploitation represents an immense saving in labour costs. Labour trafficking implies a saving of at least fifty percent, and in the worst case this cost-item is eliminated altogether (BE-E2; BE-E4; BE-E9; BE-E10). Lastly, control has an evident decisive relevance to the matter of exploitation. Monitoring or control-related costs are considerable, as keeping people in check takes a lot of time and resources (Campana, 2015; Korsell et al., 2011).

3.4. Profits and profit sharing

Proceeding from this low-cost business model perspective, trafficking in human beings is often believed to generate immense profits. On average, the overall revenues of a human trafficking operation easily add up to several tens or even hundreds of thousands of euros (BE-E2; BE-E5; BE-E12; BE-E14), not to mention the outliers who rake up millions of euros in profit (BE-E1; BE-E10). Throughout the human trafficking business, profits are subject to large fluctuations (Englund et al., 2008; OSCE, 2013). As a matter of course, trafficking in persons involves services that are provided on a continuous basis. Subsequently, the proceeds of human trafficking are patterned by a steady flow of relatively small takings (FinCen, 2014; Korsell et al., 2011). Weighed against the nominal investment required to get a human trafficking operation up and running, trafficking in human beings yields a quick and considerable profit (Kara, 2011; Mahmoud & Trebesch, 2010; Petrunov, 2011). In point of fact, a criminal entrepreneur can normally regain his initial investments in a matter of days (Leman & Janssens, 2015). Trafficking in persons is nevertheless far from the limitless source of profit it is commonly made out to be (Campana, 2015; Marcus et al., 2016). On the whole, human trafficking seems to be less profitable than other criminal undertakings, such as drug trafficking (Bruinsma & Bernasco, 2004; Levi & Reuter, 2006). Adding to that, the relative absence of economies of scale significantly limits the profit potential (Campana, 2015).

Trafficking in persons can be financially rewarding in several different ways. That is, exploiters either extort services from their victims or trade in trafficked persons (Bravo, 2008; OSCE, 2013). The latter option appears to be more and more exceptional nowadays (BE-E5; Leman & Janssens, 2008), as renting out or selling individuals is less lucrative than exploiting them over a longer period of time (Leman & Janssens, 2015). Deducting travel and living expenses, imposing fines, and wielding extortionate interest rates (Kara, 2011) increases the margin of profit as well. Concerning sexual exploitation, estimates on the proceeds vary considerably. One victim is reckoned to yield somewhere in the ballpark of €2,000 to €8,000 a week (BE-E1; BE-E6; BE-E11; Boels, 2015; Roudaut, 2011). Similarly, the number of trafficked persons stretches from a single individual (BE-E13) up to dozens of victims (BE-E5). In order to keep the operation at a manageable scale, the number of victims rarely exceeds that of a handful (BE-E1). The estimated number of clients for window workers clusters around five a day, give or take a few (BE-E6;

BE-E7; BE-E11), though sex workers can expand their clientele by engaging in other prostitution segments such as internet-based or private services (BE-E6). As for the price range of sexual services, rates are mainly contingent on the type of prostitution (BE-E6; BE-E7; BE-E12). The average price for window prostitution is €50 (BE-E6; Boels, 2015), whereas escort services are usually paid €150 (BE-E1; BE-E6). On the whole, sex workers charge somewhere around €50 to €100 for their services (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Boels, 2015). Victims of human trafficking, however, are prone to working at a cut-rate as they are in no position to refuse clients (BE-E6; BE-E12). Specifically, victims oftentimes procure services below the standard rate in order to meet revenue quotas imposed by their exploiters (Boels, 2015). In this connection, sex workers who have no say in their working conditions also have little control over the number of clients they receive (García, 2016), let alone the prices they charge. Offering services at a cut-price nonetheless affects the market for sex work and, as a consequence, creates tensions with other prostitutes (Boels, 2015). With reference to economic exploitation, the term profit takes on various meanings. By way of explanation, profits can be regarded as all direct gains from human trafficking activities. Contrarily, the profit can also be equated to all wages, social contributions, and other expenses that have been evaded in the process (BE-E9; BE-E11). In other words, the issue of sizing up profit in labour trafficking is rather muddled. The proceeds of labour trafficking largely depend on the duration and gravity of the exploitative practices (BE-E2). Moreover, low labour costs increase profits as they allow for more competitive pricing (BE-E4; BE-E11).

When it comes to divvying up the proceeds, shares are generally in accordance with the respective contribution of that member to the human trafficking operation (BE-E1; BE-E4; Petrunov, 2011). As mentioned earlier, the organiser is the one who is responsible for the redistribution of profits. This apportionment is seemingly reflective of the hierarchy present in a criminal organisation, provided that a certain degree of organisation is in fact existent in the trafficking operation. Principally, the organiser takes the lion's share of the profit, his lieutenants get a smaller piece of the pie, and so on (BE-E4; BE-E11). Interestingly, respondent BE-C3, as a more peripheral member of the operation, considered going out with the girls along with casual sexual encounters to be a form of payment in kind. In fact, he declared that he had no real financial motive to take part in these activities because he was already employed on a full time basis somewhere else and, in consequence, did not view the pin money he received for his services as the group's driver as the main perquisite of this job. On the occasion that trafficking networks externalize some of their activities, service providers or brokers are paid on a freelance basis (Leman & Janssens, 2008). As one might imagine, the trafficked workers are quite literally at the bottom of the "food chain."

By and large, offending and spending are closely connected. The greater part of criminal proceeds is blown on luxury goods as to keep up a lavish lifestyle (CGKRB, 2012). Prodigious spending sprees and conspicuous wealth are, of course, flagrant measures of the economic power one has

managed to accumulate (Petrunov, 2011). Remaining assets, if any, are usually invested (FATF, 2011; Kopp, 2012; Korsell et al., 2011; Leman & Janssens, 2015; Petrunov, 2011). Investments are predominantly made in the real estate sector, both domestically and in other countries (BE-E3; BE-E7; BE-E12). In turn, investments mostly involve legal opportunities. Respondent BE-C2, for one, dipped into the proceeds of his car wash business to set up two supplementary convenience stores. The revenues from human trafficking operations, however, can also be used to embark upon other criminal enterprises, such as drug trafficking (BE-E4). Depending on the profile and background of the offender, investments can take place in Belgium as well as abroad (BE-E4; BE-E7; BE-E8; BE-E10). Investment choices are thus marked by their notable proximity to the criminal entrepreneur. In general, investments stay close to home (Kruisbergen et al., 2015; Levi & Reuter, 2006). Lastly, part of the profits flows right back into the trafficking business with a view to sustaining subsequent cycles of operation (BE-E1; BE-E9; BE-E11; BE-E13) or, on rare occasions, to increase the scale of the illicit undertaking (BE-E1; BE-E11).

In a related manner, investing abroad points to the cross-border movement of human trafficking proceeds. As mentioned before, offenders primarily send criminal proceeds to their country of origin (Europol, 2016; Europol Financial Intelligence Group, 2015) in a bid to safeguard their financial assets. Transferring illicit earnings on a regular basis would be a sensible strategy (Korsell et al., 2011), as letting large sums of money accumulate in the country of operation runs the risk of losing the full amount of criminal proceedings at the hand of law enforcement interventions. The physical transportation of cash by cash couriers is a prevalent way of moving assets abroad which, perhaps, could be expected given the finding that trafficking in human beings, for a great part, is a cash-based economy (BE-E5; BE-E12; Europol, 2015). An illustrative example is the case of the white van courier, who was assigned the task of collecting the sex trafficking scene's filthy lucre along a set route, crossing Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany before delivering the stacks of cash to Bulgaria. The cash courier did not only move human trafficking profits in exchange for a certain commission fee, but worked for the entire Bulgarian criminal circuit in Western Europe (BE-E5; Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014). Secondly, wire transfers are increasingly avoided as a cross-border conduit for criminal assets on account of their traceability (BE-E6; Europol, 2015; Petrunov, 2011). On the off-chance that bank transfers are being used, this is usually realised by breaking down the funds into smaller transactions, by wiring money through third-party bank accounts, by having victims transfer the assets (BE-E1) or through the medium of money mules (BE-E4). Outside the traditional banking system, money service businesses such as Western Union, MoneyGram and Moneytrans are frequently used by non-Belgian offenders to repatriate profits (BE-E1; BE-E3; BE-E15). Yet again, these financial transactions are carried out under a different name with the aim of bypassing any active identification systems (BE-E5; BE-E13; Leman & Janssens, 2015). On the subject of underground banking, hawala money transfers are restricted to certain nationalities (BE-E1; BE-E5; BE-E10; Europol, 2015), such as Afghani and Pakistani ethnic groups (Soudijn, 2015). Similar to the method of

hawala banking is the Black Western Union system specific to Nigerian networks (BE-E5). In essence, criminal assets are sent to Nigeria by means of parallel money transfers run through grocery stores or other retailers (Federaal Migratiecentrum, 2014).

Transferring profits and subsequently reinserting criminal capital in the regular circuit can be considered as the most prominent method of money laundering in human trafficking operations (BE-E4; BE-E5; BE-E12; BE-E13) (FATF, 2011). It stands to reason that this method is a rampant approach to criminal money management as it is a very easy way to integrate illicit funds into the legal economy (Europol Financial Intelligence Group, 2015). However, the laundering of trafficking profits does not necessarily follow the same fixed pattern. Rather, offenders launder their illicit profits by any means possible (BE-E13), for example through purchasing alcohol cheaply and reselling it at inflated prices (BE-E4). In as much as human trafficking operations are principally clandestine enterprises (Weitzer, 2014a), the incidence of money laundering is largely uncharted territory. However, the figures presented by the Belgian Financial Intelligence Processing Unit (FIU) are, to a certain degree, indicative of the scale of this issue. Between 2010 and 2015, a total of 866 cases of money laundering connected to human trafficking activities were reported to the public prosecutor's office (CTIF-CFI, 2015). As Table 6 reveals, substantial amounts of money are involved.

TABLE 6. SCALE OF FILES LINKED TO TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND FORWARDED TO JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES BY THE BELGIAN FIU (2014 – 2016)

Year	Number of files	Total (€ million)
2014	29	17.69
2015	17	13.22
2016	20	14.63

Source: CTIF-CFI (2016).

The bottom line of any money laundering scheme is to provide criminal proceeds with a legal façade (BE-E14; Levi & Reuter, 2006). As explained above, human trafficking operations, and labour trafficking operations in particular, routinely take advantage of legitimate companies. For this reason, trafficking in persons lends itself particularly well to money laundering (Delepière et al., 2013; Europol, 2015; Levi, 2015). Provided that

a human trafficking network operates within a bona fide business structure, the comingling of legitimate and illegitimate assets is inherent to the workings of the criminal enterprise (BE-E1; BE-E14; Europol Financial Intelligence Group, 2015). As a further laundering procedure, corporate structures easily allow for trade-based money laundering (BE-E3; BE-E5), for instance through invoice fraud (BE-E4; BE-E7; BE-E10) or bogus consultancy fees (BE-E10). A striking example is the compensation system between drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings. Essentially, human trafficking organisations need hard cash to pay their workers, whereas drug traffickers need to get rid of their cash supplies. This cross-criminal exchange between two front companies is subsequently covered by false invoices (BE-E3; BE-E15; CTIF-CFI, 2016). More generally, profits are passed from one transit bank account to another (BE-E9). Not

only are obfuscated business structures consisting of many interconnecting firms conducive to the harbouring of trafficking activities, they also enable offenders to let the proceedings circle between several accounts of their own companies. Similarly, chains of subcontractors can double as pipelines for criminal assets (BE-E4). Alternatively, the accounts of victims or money mules are put to use as transit bank accounts (BE-E13; BE-E14). After passing the proceeds around, the rule of thumb is to break the paper trail by turning the profits into cash, often through smurfing techniques⁴ (BE-E3; BE-E4; BE-E15; CTIF-CFI, 2016; Delepière et al., 2013). As a consequence, the last steps of the money laundering process take effect outside the regular banking system (Delepière et al., 2013; Shelley, 2010). Overall, money laundering schemes tied to human trafficking operations rarely get more complex than this (Petrunov, 2011). In fact, the methods by which human traffickers launder their earnings are markedly similar to those used for other criminal activities (CGKRB, 2011; OSCE, 2014).

3.5. The role and impact of the internet on human trafficking activities and finances

Likewise, the internet and accompanying technological advancements constitute powerful drivers for all manner of illicit trades (Europol, 2017; Lavorgna, 2015). As regards trafficking in human beings, the Internet fulfils three main functions (Myria, 2017). First off, online classified ads, social networking sites, and dating sites all serve as recruitment hubs for trafficking victims (Hughes, 2014; Latonero, 2011; Myria, 2017). Next, the Internet is of great use to the management of human trafficking rings (BE-E5) (Myria, 2017), as it facilitates communication (BE-E1; BE-E10; BE-E13) and capacitates organisers to coordinate trafficking activities from a distance (BE-E10). Moreover, concerning the management of victims in particular, recent technologies have significantly expanded the arsenal of methods of control (BE-E1; BE-E5; BE-E7), for instance through so-called sextortion practices (Di Nicola et al., 2017; Lavorgna, 2015) or by remotely monitoring trafficked persons (Hughes, 2014). Lastly, sex trafficking victims are increasingly advertised online (Korsell et al., 2011; Myria, 2017).

Hitherto, the use of digital communication technologies has been reported more for sexual exploitation than for cases of labour trafficking (Hughes, 2014; Latonero, 2011). It appears that more traditional methods of recruitment are preferred for select target audiences, such as labourers who are located in rural areas (Latonero, 2011). The internet has nevertheless left its mark on the recruitment process of human traffickers. Above all, ICTs lower the threshold for making contact with

⁴ By way of explanation: "One of the ways that criminals can overcome some of the transaction regulation is by using external allies to circumvent restrictions on deposit amounts or add confusion to the financial trail. The classic method is to take a large cash sum, for example 100,000, and to break this down into smaller sums of between 8,000 and 9,000. A number of members of the gang or outside members such as family or friends are given batches of the money and ordered to deposit it from different banks locally to arrive at the same destination bank. This process is known as smurfing and it was devised to avoid detection when large sums of cash needed to be deposited" (Naheem, 2015, p. 518).

potential victims (BE-E1; BE-E17; Myria, 2017). In this regard, detailed social networking profiles provide the means for victim selection, social engineering, and tailored deceit (Lavorgna, 2015; Myria, 2017; Watson et al., 2015). Correspondingly, a calculated employment of ICTs can potentially replace the position of recruiter or transporter abroad in specific cases, notably one-to-one exploitation and sham marriages (BE-E4; BE-E7). Hence, social media and other technologies present an unparalleled opportunity for individual traffickers to set up their own operation (Tripp & McMahon-Howard, 2016). Furthermore, technological developments have left a marked impact on the working conditions and areas of activity of sex work in general (García, 2016). After all, online classified ads and specialised websites provide a relatively covert and discrete way of advertising sexual services and accessing clients compared to the alternative of publicly displaying prostitutes in red light districts (BE-E11). Sex trafficking networks have accordingly shifted their main fields of operation from bars and windows to private and clandestine soliciting (BE-E4; BE-E11; Di Nicola et al., 2017). Against this background, the present surge of private forms of prostitution in the wake of the ongoing digital revolution is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, web-based soliciting grants sex workers a certain level of freedom, independence, and concealment from the public view. From the opposed point of view, this clandestineness could lead to precarious situations (García, 2016). For example, the presence of police officers in Belgian vice districts serves as a tool to enhance social control (Weitzer, 2014b). Yet, when sexual encounters take place in apartments or disreputable hotel rooms, this type of external oversight is virtually absent. On top of promoting anonymity, new communication technologies have drastically cut the transaction costs of private prostitution and escort services, in particular by cutting back the expenditure on accommodation (Adriaenssens et al., 2015). Conversely, the impact of cryptocurrencies on the human trafficking business model has been far less extensive (BE-E3; Europol, 2015). As bearer negotiable instruments, decentralised and encrypted virtual currencies such as bitcoin can be regarded as perfectly legal facilitators of money laundering (BE-E14; Brenig et al., 2015). What has kept this inexpensive system of transferring from taking off, is the limited acceptability of cryptocurrencies and the fact that cashing outside the system is still a problem (Brenig et al., 2015). Cryptocurrencies nevertheless embody an insidious trend in managing criminal finances (BE-E14). Law enforcement agencies should therefore be alert to the possibility of recent technological advancements gaining a firmer foothold in the human trafficking business model.

Notwithstanding the glaring advantages set out above, the use of internet and assorted technologies bears a number of drawbacks for human trafficking organisations. As the online outposts of human trafficking activities form a rare instance where criminal operations do actually surface, websites such as redlights.be (BE-E5; BE-E6) or backpage.com (Portnoff et al., 2017) provide an interesting avenue to identify human trafficking cases (Di Nicola et al., 2017; Latonero, 2011; Myria, 2017; Watson et al., 2015). By and of itself, online classified ads selling sex are rife with potentially inculpatory information (Portnoff et al., 2017). Tracing back these ads to the exploiters behind them constitutes a major

step in countering human trafficking for sexual exploitation and, more importantly, this same alertness is gradually seeping through the law enforcement spectrum (BE-E5; BE-E6; Myria, 2017). Additionally, websites where clients discuss the sex workers they have visited can be used to single out trafficking cases (Adriaenssens et al., 2015; Korsell et al., 2011). Moreover, through the use of digital communication technologies, all kinds of transactions and communications are registered (Hughes, 2014). Antithetically to the deceptive opportunities of the internet, websites (e.g. Etransport.pl) where truck drivers exchange experiences and information about their employers enable potential victims to warn each other for trafficking practices (BE-E10; Myria, 2017).

4. FINANCIAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THB CRIMES: CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES

Going from “digital smoke signals” (Latonero, 2011, p. 37) to the financial footprints of human trafficking offences, financial investigations are widely regarded as an essential tool of an effective response to the criminal threat of trafficking in persons. In Belgium, financial investigations can be categorised as either minimal or maximal (BE-E1). Financial investigations adhering to the minimal approach are essentially a matter of calculating or tracing criminally obtained assets with a view to confiscation (BE-E2; BE-E4; BE-E10; BE-E11). In this sense, minimal financial investigations are quasi standard practice in human trafficking cases (BE-E1; BE-E6; BE-E12; BE-E13). More profound financial investigations that go beyond the purpose of sheer confiscation, on the contrary, are relatively infrequent and seem to be limited to bigger cases (BE-E1; BE-E7; BE-E8). Whichever option is deemed suitable in a concrete case is at the consideration of the prosecutor’s office (BE-E1; BE-E4). In spite of this fractional application, profound financial investigations are paramount to laying bare the structure of trafficking organisations (CGKRB, 2012; FATF, 2012; Shelley, 2010). Likewise, an effective financial investigation mirrors the findings of the principal criminal investigation (BE-E10). Accordingly, thorough financial inquiries are highly relevant to the issue of providing evidence (BE-E5; BE-E14; Brown et al., 2012). As yet, this case building potential is clearly underused (Kruisbergen et al., 2016). In effect, financial investigations have demonstrated their added value in supporting the charge of criminal conspiracy or criminal organisation (BE-E5; CGKRB, 2012; Leman & Janssens, 2015). As specified above, money is what ties the different parts of a human trafficking operation together. Consequently, delving into those finances is one of the few ways to take hold of the elusive men behind the curtain or top tiers of the human trafficking business when dealing with more sophisticated trafficking rings (BE-E5). Ultimately, knowing where the funds come from and where they go sheds a different light on a traffic that is difficult to chart directly (Kopp, 2012).

With regard to the purpose of confiscation, two methods can be used to determine the size of a trafficker’s illicit fortune (BE-E14). The method

of asset evaluation consists of stacking up the capital one has amassed over a suspicious period of time against the defendant's legal income in pursuance of demonstrating unexplained wealth (Brown, 2013). Alternatively, investigators turn to the direct calculation of criminally obtained assets. As far as sexual exploitation is concerned, the asset investigation and recovery unit of the Belgian Federal police is disposed to working out the total of criminal earnings or assisting human trafficking investigators in this calculation. Though conventionally, the calculation of criminal proceeds is seen as a standard investigative practice (BE-E6; BE-E14). The overall takings of a sex trafficking operation typically correspond to the sum of the number of identified victims, how much the victims have earned, and how much these trafficked individuals had to hand over to their exploiters (BE-E6). In the case of labour exploitation, social inspection services are usually entrusted with calculating the proceeds (BE-E1; BE-E2; BE-E4). The criminal financial gain in labour trafficking rests on two key elements, namely unpaid wages and unpaid social contributions (BE-E2; BE-E4; BE-E9). The total proceeds of a labour trafficking business are further shaped by factors such as the duration of employment, working hours, the type of labour involved, and so on (BE-E9). Parenthetically, the calculation of criminal proceeds is a telling way of quantifying the infraction (BE-E4). As a rule, operating costs are not brought into the equation (BE-E3), for the reason that confiscation is the first and foremost reason for calculating criminal assets.

Although invaluable to disrupting human trafficking operations, financial investigations are bound by considerable challenges and numerous practical problems. Going down the rabbit hole of criminal finances is an inherently time-consuming endeavour (BE-E4; BE-E7; BE-E8; BE-E14). However, lengthy investigations run counter to the principle of reasonable delay and the fact that a lot of non-resident defendants are held in temporary custody implies that human trafficking investigations are regularly conducted under pressure of time (BE-E4; BE-E7). In a similar vein, financial investigations are hampered by a general lack of resources (BE-E4; BE-E8; BE-E10; Delepière et al., 2013). This problem is exacerbated by the oftentimes complicated nature of human trafficking cases (BE-E1; BE-E2; BE-E4; BE-E5; BE-E7), which require the involvement of specialised investigators (BE-E1; BE-E4; BE-E7) and by the extensive use of counter-strategies. Whereas financial investigations move slow, the flow of financial transactions is immensely faster than the ability of investigative authorities to track them (BE-E4; OSCE, 2014).

The international aspect integral to most human trafficking operations complicates matters even more (Brown et al., 2012; Delepière et al., 2013; Soudijn, 2014). Over the years, the response to human trafficking has been raised to an transnational level in order to meet this complexity (de Jager et al., 2016; Goodey, 2008). Traditionally, international cooperation takes the form of written requests for mutual legal assistance or letters rogatory. However, this approach is virtually impracticable in the face of complex cross-border cases (Spapens, 2011). That is, requests for judicial assistance tend to be rather laborious (BE-E11; BE-E13). Parallel investigations and joined investigation teams (JITs), on the contrary, are intended to cut back on this tedious to-ing and fro-ing. The added value

of JITs in particular lies in the facilitation of exchanging information and expertise (BE-E12) (OSCE, 2013). In addition, JITs enable investigators to follow the money trail beyond national borders, thus expediting the confiscation of criminal assets abroad (BE-E5; BE-E11). The last few years have shown a marked increase in the use of JITs in human trafficking cases (Eurojust, 2017). In turn, the use of JITs is only gradually gaining foothold in Belgium (BE-E1). On the whole, international collaboration in human trafficking investigations has known widely varying degrees of success (BE-E10; BE-E11; BE-E12). Even so, transnational cooperation is of vital importance, as one could seriously question the effectiveness of tackling a phenomenon that essentially drifts between nations on a local level (BE-E5; BE-E9; BE-E13). Besides, increasing international collaboration advances a better understanding of the transnational dimension of the human trafficking business (Leman & Janssens, 2015).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All things considered, the adage that trafficking in human beings is a low risk, high pay-off crime still stands (FATF, 2011; Finance Against Trafficking, 2014; OSCE, 2013). In the first place, the human trafficking business is set apart by a remarkably low market entry barrier (Kopp, 2012; Wheaton et al., 2010). Whereas exploitative practices yield considerable profits, the associated risks are close to negligible. Seeing that trafficking in human beings offences are notoriously difficult to prove (Balarezo, 2013; Eurojust, 2015; UNODC, 2016), the conviction rates for this type of transgression are relatively low (Kara, 2011; OSCE, 2013; Wheaton et al., 2010). Furthermore, those who are convicted for trafficking offences are usually met with rather feeble prison terms (Balarezo, 2013; Kara, 2011). In general, the bulk of human trafficking convicts received no prison time or a partially or fully suspended prison sentence (U.S. Department of State, 2017). As for Belgium, half of the prison sentences for human trafficking offences in 2016 ranged between one and three years (Myria, 2017). Accordingly, increasing the risks should be regarded as a fundamental policy direction (Bouché & Shady, 2017). Per contra, raising the costs of human trafficking would be to no avail, as passing on expenditures to victims and clients is ingrained in the trafficking business model. Related to the low risk nature of this criminal enterprise is the fact that human trafficking is a severely under-detected offence (Goodey, 2008; Guia, 2015; Kleemans & Smit, 2014). There are a number of conceivable ways to counteract this problem. Raising awareness, educating frontline practitioners, and building expertise among investigative authorities is pivotal in uncovering a crime that hides in plain sight (BE-E2; BE-E6; Aronowitz et al., 2010). Bearing in mind that a number of trafficking modalities rely on public venues, such as bars and massage parlours, which require a permit from the local municipality (Weitzer, 2014b), an administrative approach to trafficking in human beings would undoubtedly reinforce efforts to expose exploitative practices (BE-E11; Aronowitz et al., 2010). Against this background, it is important to note that, under the influence

of technological advancements, the market of sex trafficking has broadly shifted from public to more private forms of prostitution. This displacement evidently broadens the issue of detection from patrolling red light districts to monitoring websites and private venues. More generally, advancements in communication and technology have shaped the current human trafficking business model to a certain extent and will continue to do so in the future. In this irrevocable evolution lies a considerable challenge for investigative authorities and policy makers (BE-E13; BE-E14).

On the subject of investigating human trafficking offences, law enforcement agencies often lack the incentive to peg away at financial data, whereas financial investigators are generally pressed for knowledge of human trafficking operations (OSCE, 2014). Traditionally, investigators have been more interested in the criminal activity itself rather than its financial bearings (Kruisbergen et al., 2016; Soudijn, 2014). The two are nevertheless inherently linked. As a consequence, creating synergies between human trafficking investigators and financial investigators is crucial in terms of assuring a comprehensive response (BE-E12; BE-E14). Efforts to combat human trafficking should not only transcend law enforcement bounds, but also national borders where needed (BE-E3; BE-E9). International cooperation is pivotal in connection with preventing displacement effects (Aronowitz, 2001) and confiscating criminal assets abroad (Kruisbergen et al., 2016; Savona & Riccardi, 2015). One should, however, bear in mind that, even though depriving a trafficking ring from its criminal proceedings can have a disrupting or disheartening effect, the low monetary threshold associated with starting a human trafficking operation implies that taking away financial resources does not necessarily serve the purpose of taking out these criminal organisations indefinitely.

The issue of trafficking in persons is in fact a composite of multifarious networks and manners of operating. Turning the tables on human traffickers, therefore, requires a tailored response (Efrat, 2016). Knowing when to wield the scalpel and when the elephant gun lies at the very heart of posing multifaceted solutions to an equally diversified problem (Shelley, 2010). Accordingly, the response to human trafficking should cover more of a nuanced approach than mere criminal prosecution (Davies, 2017; Efrat, 2016). In this context, a convenient point of entry is the interlacing between upper- and underworld. By means of dislodging criminal infiltration of the licit economy, financial investigations present opportunities for disrupting criminal organisations beyond asset recovery (Brown, 2013; Roudaut, 2011).

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Respondent code	Position/Department	Institution/Role
BE-E1	Head of Central Human Trafficking Unit	Belgian Federal Police
BE-E2	Head of Human Trafficking Directorate	Inspectorate of the National Social Security Office, Belgium
BE-E3	Strategic Analyst	Belgian Financial Intelligence Processing Unit (CTIF-CFI)
BE-E4	Head of Human Trafficking Unit	Inspectorate of the National Social Security Office, Belgium
BE-E5	Policy Analyst	Federal Migration Centre Myria, Belgium
BE-E6	Head of Prostitution Unit	Belgian Local Police
BE-E7	Legal Expert	Specialized Reception Centre for Victims of Human Trafficking, Belgium
BE-E8	Labour Prosecutor	Public Prosecutor's Office, Belgium
BE-E9	Labour Prosecutor	Public Prosecutor's Office, Belgium
BE-E10	Labour Prosecutor	Public Prosecutor's Office, Belgium
BE-E11	Public Prosecutor	Public Prosecutor's Office, Belgium
BE-E12	Head of Human Trafficking Unit	Belgian Federal Police
BE-E13	Public Prosecutor	Public Prosecutor's Office, Belgium
BE-E14	Head of Asset Investigation and Recovery Unit	Belgian Federal Police
BE-E15	Strategic Analyst	Belgian Financial Intelligence Processing Unit (CTIF-CFI)
BE-E16	Labour Prosecutor	Public Prosecutor's Office, Belgium
BE-C1	Criminal Entrepreneur	Souteneur
BE-C2	Criminal Entrepreneur	Employer
BE-C3	Criminal Entrepreneur	Souteneur

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